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Incorporating international mindedness into everyday learning

Elisabeth Barratt Hacking, Kate Bullock and Sue Martin explore how IB World Schools are embracing IM

In the 21st century, a curriculum limited to academic and other personal proficiencies is no longer deemed sufficient. International mindedness (IM) aims to broaden traditional school achievements by developing an enduring philosophy for living that will enable understanding of global issues and lead to a more peaceful, equitable and optimistic world. This has become a central concern and challenge for many international schools, especially those that are authorised to deliver one or more of the four programmes of the International Baccalaureate (IB). Many 'IB World Schools' have now embraced this complex initiative and are incorporating IM matters into their everyday practice and curriculum.

But what does a school community mean by IM and what exactly are schools doing to introduce and engage with the philosophy? An in-depth study was carried out by a research team from the University of Bath (the three authors of this article, plus Chloe Blackmore, Tristan Bunnell and Michael Donnelly) to examine systematically how IB World Schools conceptualise and develop IM, and to explore related challenges and problems (Barratt Hacking *et al*, 2017, 2018). The study was intended to capture and share promising practice from all stages of learning, where *promising* practice was used rather than *good* practice given the complexities and challenges facing schools when developing IM. Good practice in one context might not work in another; schools in challenging contexts (for example, where political or religious norms may limit IM practice)

may need to develop contextually sensitive practices. 'Thus the research aimed to find examples of practice in diverse and challenging contexts that showed promise, and where schools were actively working on IM, in order to identify practical examples of support and assessment of IM' (Barratt Hacking *et al*, 2018). Nine case study schools, identified as being strongly engaged with IM, were selected for an in-depth scrutiny of their practice and thinking related to IM. A variety of perspectives and ideas were obtained from school leaders, teachers, students and parents at each school. In addition, actual practices, behaviours and actions were systematically observed in the school. Throughout the project, the research was guided and informed by an Expert Panel bringing together a mix of knowledge and experience with regard to IM, including a balance of practice, policy and academic/research perspectives, and alumni of the IB Diploma Programme. This first article from the project shares key aspects of the schools' philosophies and initial strategies. A second article, which will follow in a later issue of this publication, explores some of the innovative strategies and activities relating to IM that we observed.

Defining IM

We began with focus groups where key practitioners were asked to talk about the ideal internationally-minded student in terms of their head (knowledge), heart (values), and hands (skills).

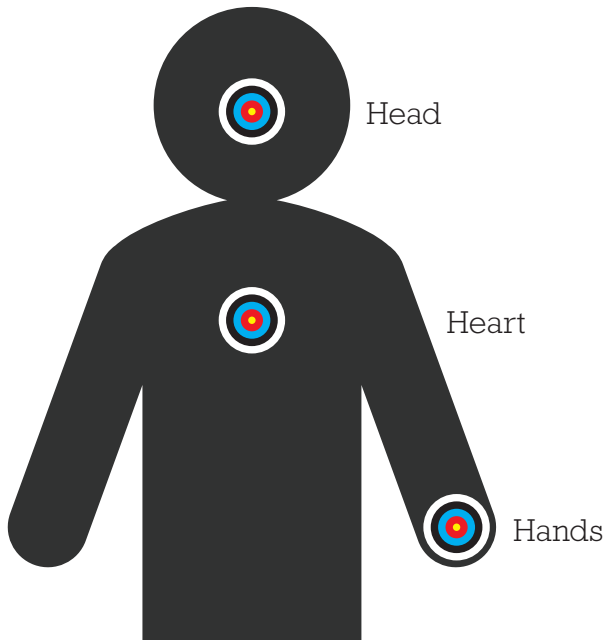
It was made clear that IM should not be viewed as something that happens as a matter of course in an IB World School. In all the case study schools, the principal and senior leadership team had embedded IM into their strategic thinking and were prioritising and visioning the development of the philosophy.

Features

Figure 1: Head, Heart, Hands Activity

What does it mean to be internationally minded?

Think about the ideal student when they leave your school ... what do students leave with? ... in what ways are students internationally minded?



Head

Heart

Hands

[with acknowledgement to iserveafrica.org]

Head – what do students know and understand, including self-knowledge?

Heart – what do students believe in and value ... feelings, values/ attitudes?

Hands – what can students do: skills, actions, experience/ expertise?

A wide variety of answers was given to these questions, as summarised in Table 1. These qualities could be referred to as intercultural competencies (Jokikokko, 2005) and are similar to the desirable attributes for global citizens set out by Oxfam (2015).

Table 1: Analysis of Head, Heart, Hands responses

| Head (Knowledge & understanding of) | Heart (Values) | Hands (Skills) |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - different views & practices - other cultures, religions, current affairs, different political systems - other worldviews - global issues e.g. climate change, migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tolerance - respect - open-mindedness - acceptance - empathy - caring - curiosity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - language & communication (verbal or body language) - problem solving, critical thinking - cultural empathy & diplomacy - confidence & emotional resilience - adaptability - social & listening skills, seeing different points of view - ability to prioritise, risk-taking |

However, our promising practice schools had largely moved beyond *personal* competencies. What these schools had

in common was that IM was understood to be something that develops within *interpersonal* relationships. There was much consensus that IM is about reaching out to interact with people who have different perspectives from our own, learning to understand and respect their point of view (even if we do not agree with them), learning to live in other cultural contexts and to adapt to new situations. In this, schools were seeking a change in attitude rather than an increase in knowledge. At the same time, many talked about the importance of reaching in and exploring our own sense of identity, challenging ourselves to grow as individuals, and learning to acknowledge and explore our own assumptions and limitations. This perspective was also observed by Belal (2017). As Figure 2 indicates, IM therefore becomes *reaching out* to relate to others and *reaching in* to understand ourselves.

This understanding of IM involving interconnectedness and interdependency was very evident in all the nine case study schools we visited, even though it is not explicit in the IB (2009) definition. Our research identified many ways in which schools can provide opportunities for students to *reach in* and *reach out* in this way.

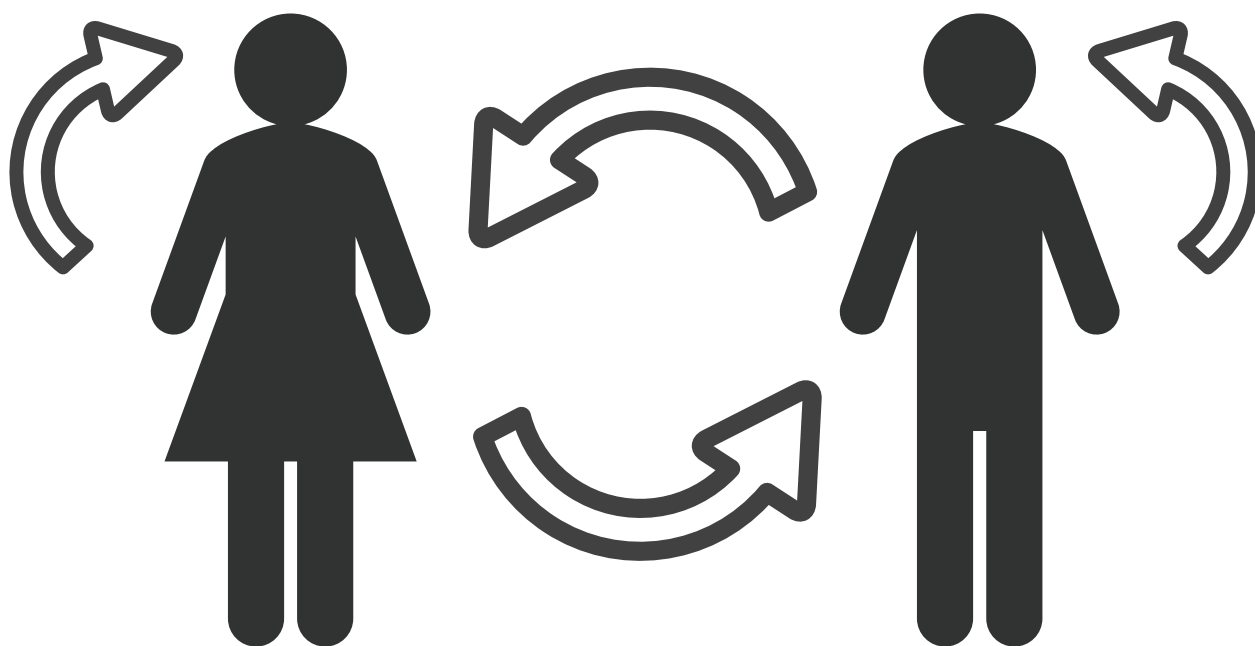
Starting off – Intentionality

It was made clear that IM should not be viewed as something that happens as a matter of course in an IB World School. In all the case study schools, the principal and senior leadership team had embedded IM into their strategic thinking and were prioritising and visioning the development of the philosophy. A significant priority was an overt focus on, and discussion of, IM throughout the school. Members of staff described this as a change from a context where IM was absorbed by osmosis, to one where it was specifically advanced and monitored.

The transition from the 'implicit' past to the 'explicit' present often relied on a trigger to alert staff to a more determined focus on IM as this created a greater sense of awareness of where individuals were in terms of their own understanding and development of IM. A first stage was often the re-wording of mission statements and policies that guided practice and procedure. Other strategies included the identification of IM champions to drive forward work on IM. The importance of a named member of staff, or staff team with devolved responsibility for IM leadership, was clear and ensured momentum. A focus on IM in staff professional development, including induction, was also an important aspect of a school's commitment to IM. Staff benefitted from opportunities to explore what IM is and what it means to them personally, as well as how students can be supported in developing IM. For one Primary Years Programme (PYP) school, this included a self-evaluation tool for staff. In other schools, professional development focussed on a topical issue; one example was 'Prevent' training to counter radicalisation and extremism.

Several schools embarked on a process to define IM, and agreed that this activity was more important than the final definition of IM. Frequently, this was a collaborative process involving teachers, students and parents. Collective tasks were to research, discuss and write definitions of IM. In one school, the energy of these discussions generated a visual representation of IM and indicators to indicate effectiveness. This model is now referred to in student assemblies, staff

Figure 2: Reaching in: Reaching out



meetings and parent meetings, and is displayed on the walls of many classrooms and corridors. It is also embedded into the vision and motto of the school. Student participation and involvement in school decision-making and organisation also provided clear opportunities to model and develop aspects of IM such as responsibility, care and respect for others and open mindedness.

Encouraging student voice and giving students responsibility for IM-related work was another way in which IM leadership was devolved. School systems for embedding student voice included peer support and guidance, councils and fora as well as approaches integrated into everyday lessons. For example, a Guidance and Support Group (GSG) programme in a Middle Years Programme (MYP) school involved older children in the school being elected 'leaders' who then spend time in a class lower down the school leading a discussion. The leaders were responsible for developing a theme to talk about, as well as a structure for the session and any necessary learning materials. The topic covered was normally a discussion of a contemporary international issue or ongoing debate. In the class, the leaders (usually two per class) then guided the discussion and activities they had prepared. The teacher was present but did not get involved.

Finally, there was a widespread view from staff across the nine case study schools that the IB curriculum promotes IM and 'forces you to ... infuse international mindedness', as noted by a senior leader in an MYP school. The teachers interviewed described opportunities to embed IM into their planning. Teachers played a significant role in how far the enacted IB curriculum contributed to IM through, for example, their repertoire and choice of resources and examples, and by providing opportunities to analyse multiple perspectives. The students, themselves, provided a significant resource for work around IM. Schools found opportunities for students to lead learning through, for example, sharing stories and

experiences, discussing ideas, asking questions and pursuing their own avenues for enquiry.

The second article, to follow in a later issue of this publication, will set out further examples of promising practice. The full report of this IB-funded research study may be accessed via www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ib-research/continuum/international-mindedness-final-report-2017-en.pdf

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**Elisabeth Barratt Hacking, Kate Bullock, Sue Martin, Chloe Blackmore, Tristan Bunnell and Michael Donnelly are researchers in the Department of Education at the University of Bath, UK.
Email: E.C.B.Hacking@bath.ac.uk**